

Controlling Aphis and Slugs

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

THOSE optimists who hoped that the hard winter would kill off many of the pests with, I am afraid, be disappointed, because it looks as if my own pessimistic view of the problem, which I expressed in January, is turning out to be the right one. It certainly appears that the cold weather helped the pests, partly because the birds were unable to deal with them for us, and many thousands of birds were killed during the cold spell.

Slugs are already appearing in disconcerting numbers, and the aphis are already out on some plants. The aphis family breed with frightening speed, but fortunately most of them do not survive. If, however, this is going to be a vintage year for aphis, as it might well be, we would be well advised to take action and be prepared to wage a steady and unrelenting war upon the whole aphis family. There is really only one way to control aphis, and that is to spray once a week everything in the garden that shows the slightest sign of aphis infection, using one of the recommended greenfly killers.

Natural Products

Opinions are always sharply divided about the kinds of insecticides to be used. Some people refuse to apply BHC or any of the other factory made chemicals, preferring to use derris or pyrethrum, which are natural products. It is interesting that there have been no recorded cases, to my knowledge, of pests building up resistance to these natural materials, whereas they do build up resistance to the other chemicals, and it is necessary to ring the changes with the types of spray used. Last year we had excellent results with the new chemical menazon, which is systemic, that is, it is absorbed into the sap stream of the plant and has a very long lasting effect. We sprayed our broad beans with it at the first signs of blackfly and it was a month before we saw any further signs of trouble. We sprayed them again, and that kept them clean for the whole of their life.

For the slugs there still seems to be nothing better than metaldehyde in one form or another, and a programme of ruthless garden hygiene, clearing away all the dead leaves and other rubbish that can provide a refuge for the slugs during the daytime.

Mice have not been so troublesome this year, stealing the peas under the cloches, but the warm dry soil under a cloche must be a great temptation to a mouse to burrow in search of our newly sown peas. Trapping is usually pretty effective, and we have always found that the finest bait to a mouse is a melon seed, and we always keep some of the seed from our summer melons just for this purpose. If one has access to plenty of gorse, this chopped and sown along with the peas has a wonderful deterrent effect.

Just now the buds on blackcurrant bushes which are affected with the big bug mite are very apparent, and these swollen buds should be removed and burnt. If there are many of them, it will probably pay to remove the bushes after this year's crop and plant with fresh, clean stock.

Balanced Fertilizer

The strawberries would benefit from a dressing of a balanced fertilizer just now, and an hour spent tying raspberry canes to their wires and removing the tips of the growths that were killed back by the winter frosts would be worth while.

This year we have decided to try growing blueberries, those fairly large bushes which are so popular in America for making blueberry pie and other succulent dessert dishes. They do need acid soil, and as our soil is just on the turn we have tried planting them in soil which has been enriched with peat and sulphate of ammonia. Briefly, the recommended process is to dig a hole 18in. wide and 12in. deep, mix half of the soil from the hole with peat or leaf mould, then mix in 3oz. of sulphate of ammonia. Replace the mixture in the hole until about 2in. below the ground level, set the plant on this, and cover the roots with the remaining 2in. of mixture. A good mulch around the plant is helpful, and a top dressing of 2-3oz. of sulphate of ammonia may be added in June, if the plant appears to lack vigour.

We naturally expect trouble from the birds, as they are very fond of blueberries, but we must hope that they will be deterred from feasting on our crop by Scarabweb, which still does seem to be very effective, at least in my own garden, in protecting the buds on our fruit trees and bushes. The birds just keep well away from trees and bushes that are festooned with this fine "spider's web" of rayon waste.

We have also found that the lawn seed which one can now buy treated with a bird repellent does not seem to interest the birds at all, and some trials we made with it last year proved extremely successful. But as more and more farmers and market gardeners cut down their hedges, the birds seem to be seeking refuge in gardens in increasing numbers, and I am convinced that the sparrows at least have changed their feeding habits in recent years, as they do untold damage to buds of many kinds. I am no ornithologist, and I may be wrong, but I am fairly sure that most of the damage they do is out of sheer cussedness or boredom.

Gardening.

FROM A CORRESPONDENT.

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